



OPERATIONAL HEALTH SERVICE MANAGEMENT: UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF INFORMATION IN DECISION-MAKING SAHR KWIK SKWIZ SERIES

This KWIK SKWIZ:



summarises Chapter 11 of the 2014/15 South African Health Review.

- Operational decision-making is vital to facility and health system performance.
- Operational health service managers play a key role in strengthening the health system at the level of implementation, particularly with increasingly decentralised processes such as those introduced by the devolution of human resource and quality management to facility level.
- While the strategic importance of district management is often stated, the nature of, challenges to and opportunities for management strengthening at this level are generally not well understood. The particular role of primary care facility managers is often overlooked in health management discussions about this setting, yet the current South African Strategic Human Resources for Health Plan notes their importance.
- Health information systems (HIS) provide valuable support for local management. In South Africa there has been a substantial investment in HIS strengthening through policy development, software and infrastructure development, appointment and development of health information officers and managers, a review of minimum data sets to refine indicator sets, and development of procedures to improve the quality and timeliness of routine information. Attention has also been given to generating formal information in quality assurance processes required and supported by the Policy on Quality in Health Care for South Africa and National Core Standards for Health Establishments in South Africa, which require detailed supervisory checklists and facility and clinical audits.
- In contrast, there has been little progress in developing a coherent Human Resource Information System (HRIS) – another component of the overall Health Management Information System (HMIS) – despite the gaps being identified and possible solutions being posited as early as 2005. The development of an HRIS in South Africa should be aligned with the current needs of primary care facility managers if it is to strengthen the devolved HR management.
- At facility level, HR management requires skills in people management and knowledge about particular staff members and staff collectives.
- The nature of operational management requires facility managers to use rich, local and particular information about processes, staff, clients and the community context in order to strengthen performance management

and service delivery. They also need to be able to develop and use experience-based knowledge.

- Primary care facility managers therefore value and require both formal information from the HMIS and informal, local information and experience-based knowledge in their routine management practices. These two forms of information are often used interactively in decision-making, or in sequence over time.
- Ortiz Aragón's Theory of Change framework provides a system lens for thinking about how to develop organisational or health system capacity to generate and use both forms of information in decision-making.
- Attention to governance and values across all levels of the health system is needed to support facility-level practices that generate and use local information and experience-based knowledge, as well as formal information from the HMIS.

SOURCE:

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